**Security Threats Ahead of General Elections**

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After an unusually prolonged period of political turmoil, the general election date has finally been set by the Election Commission of Pakistan. February 8 will decide which political party is going to rule 220 million people of Pakistan. It is not unexpected that there is still some scepticism about the elections really taking place, but the activism and involvement of the concerned people suggest elections are most likely on the set date. After years of political destabilization, the country is finally moving forward.

The downside to this political development, however, is the threat of terrorism.

According to the data released by the Pakistan Institute of Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS), the acts of terrorism in Pakistan increased by 80 per cent in 2023 as compared to last year. So far, more than 800 people have been victims of the increased terrorism. A majority of these terrorist acts were perpetrated by banned militant outfits, such as the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) and Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). According to the Pakistani intelligence agencies, these anti-state militant outfits are supported by India for destabilizing Pakistan. Both share an anti-Pakistan agenda.

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India’s involvement in supporting transnational terrorism is now being gradually unveiled. The biggest exposition of this came when Canada’s Prime Minister Justin Trudeau directly accused India of being involved in the killing of a Canadian Sikh citizen Hardeep Singh Nijjar. Because of his pro-Khalistan activism, India designated him a terrorist a year before his assassination. Apart from this incident, adequate analysis has been made of RAW’s involvement in many violent incidents inside Pakistan as well. In this year alone, two such incidents have been recorded where members of the Sikh community were killed in broad daylight by “unknown” assassins.

The current threat to Pakistan, especially during the electoral process, stems from the fact that India continues to sponsor the BLA and TTP, and its opposition to the Khalistan movement. In an intelligence report, it was revealed that India provided the TTP commanders with weapons that also included the deadly IEDs. The report also disseminated multiple transactions made from India to finance terrorism in Pakistan. And now Canada’s accusation based on the Five Eyes’ intelligence proves New Delhi’s involvement in state-sponsored terrorism. In April of this year, the Ministry of Defence reported to the Supreme Court of Pakistan that India may exploit the fault lines to hurt the federation if elections in Punjab were to be held earlier. The intel, combined with the killing of Najjar, cements the possibility of India’s use of violence against Pakistan in the coming general election.

During the election campaigns, a lot of mass assemblies will be observed. Social and political gatherings throughout the country will be a norm for several months. Such rallies are prone to vulnerability. Therefore, there is a tangible threat in Pakistan coming from its immediate neighbour. Not just of terrorism, the threat can also be of a different nature. In 2020, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation reported that the country’s security agencies were monitoring India’s deliberate influence in the federal election through its diaspora. In 2021, the European Union DisinfoLab exposed how Indian media was involved in propagating false news against Pakistan. Considering India’s past actions, the threat can be of any nature.

Despite its audacity to openly destabilize Pakistan, India conveniently plays the victim on international forums. New Delhi accuses Pakistan of providing a safe haven to the Sikh separatists belonging to the Khalistan movement. But it overlooks its proven involvement in countless terrorist activities on Pakistani soil. In 2016, a Pakistani security agency captured an Indian spy from its Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) named Kulbhushan Jadhav. He admitted to having carried out terrorist activities in Balochistan which were intended to destabilize the Pakistani federation. In 2019, another of India’s soldiers, Wing Commander Abhinandan, was captured in Pakistan when his plane was shot down by Pakistan Air Force. As a symbol of peace and humanity, Pakistan soon released him. But India’s double standards remain in place as it continues to support anti-Pakistan militant groups.

Pakistan and India have engaged in military standoffs since their inception. If they continue to engage in these conflicts, their fate will be much like the present Israel-Palestine conflict. Palestine, being the weak party, stands at a continuous disadvantage, gradually losing its territory, identity and sovereignty. All international mediation attempts have failed to bring peace to the region. Regardless of which party is weaker, the certain thing is that both parties are at a loss.

War is not a solution to settle a dispute. And there is no solid example in which international mediation has brought two conflicting parties to peace. This is a lesson that India and Pakistan can learn from the Israel-Palestine conflict. To resolve their disputes through bilateral dialogue is the only way forward. Unless the practice of populist politics thrives in India, the chances of such a diplomatic effort will remain nil.

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